

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 EB-07 AID-05

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FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7447

INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, MILI, PFOR, GB, AO

SUBJ: US MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO GABON

REF: LIBREVILLE 0364 (NOTAL)

1. PRESIDENT BONGO CALLED ME EVENING FEBRUARY 27 TO PURSUE QUESTION OF STATUS USG DECISION ON MILITARY ASSISTANCE IN GREATER DEPTH THAN HAD BEEN POSSIBLE IN AIRPORT RECEIVING LINE.
 2. THIS TIME, PRESIDENT VERBALIZED HIS DISAPPOINTMENT THAT NO DECISION HAD YET BEEN REACHED. WHEN I PLEADED THAT SECRETARY'S ABSENCE IN LATIN AMERICAN HAD PERHAPS BEEN FACTOR IN CAUSING DELAY, PRESIDENT SAID THAT EARLIER TRIPS BY SECRETARY HAD BEEN CITED TO THIS EFFECT IN PREVIOUS MONTHS SO THAT HE WAS BEGINNING TO WONDER WHETHER PROBLEM WAS PERHAPS MORE FUNDAMENTAL.
 3. IN WAKE CONGRESSIONAL REFUSAL TO PERMIT USG PURSUE COURSE IN ANGOLA ON WHICH AFRICAN FRIENDS HAD BEEN COUNTING, PRESIDENT SAID, AFRICAN FRIENDS OF WEST WERE FEELING INCREASINGLY EXPOSED TO ACTUAL AND POTENTIAL THREATS FROM SOVIET-EQUIPPED NEIGHBORS. US CREDIBILITY HAD SUFFERED BADLY, HE CONTINUED, AND HE AND LIKE-
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MINDED CHIEFS OF STATE (HE MENTIONED ONLY HOUPHOUET IN

THIS CONTEXT) WERE SEEKING REASSURANCE THAT USG COULD STILL BE COUNTED ON FOR SUPPORT. IT WAS IN THIS BROADER CONTEXT, AS WELL AS SIMPLY IN TERMS OF GABONESE SECURITY, THAT USG RESPONSE TO GABONESE REQUEST WOULD BE MEASURED.

4. AGAIN SOUGHT TO ASSURE PRESIDENT THAT DECISION WOULD BE FORTHCOMING SHORTLY, AND PROMISED TO COMMUNICATE HIS CONCERN TO DEPARTMENT ON URGENT BASIS.

5. COMMENT: AS NOTED REFTTEL, PRESIDENT'S IMPATIENCE IS BECOMING TINGED WITH GENUINE CONCERN ABOUT US ABILITY OR WILLINGNESS TO SUPPORT ITS FRIENDS IN AFRICA. OUR CREDIBILITY IS AT STAKE HERE ALONG WITH OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS, AND IT IS THE FORMER WHICH HAS GREATEST NEED OF A PROMPT REPLY TO BONGO'S THREE-MONTH OLD REQUEST. STEIGMAN

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